

Labor and Public Employees Committee

Public Testimony of Connecticut Women's Education and Legal Fund (CWEALF)

S.B. 938: An Act Concerning Unemployment for Striking Workers

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The Connecticut Women's Education and Legal Fund (CWEALF) is a statewide nonprofit that advocates for and empowers women and girls in Connecticut, especially those who are underserved or marginalized. For nearly fifty years, CWEALF has been a leading advocate for policies that advance the economic security of women across our state and promote gender equity in the workplace.

CWEALF supports S.B. 938: *An Act Concerning Unemployment for Striking Workers*.

Connecticut workers who go on strike are unable to collect unemployment benefits as they are presumed to have left their jobs voluntarily. Workers do not make the decision to go on strike lightly: it is an extremely difficult decision because workers risk a loss of income or permanent loss of their jobs, especially when replacement workers hired to continue operations during the strike stay on as permanent employees.

Senate Bill No. 908 is designed to avoid a labor dispute. If an employer understands that striking workers will be eligible to collect unemployment benefits after a two-week waiting period, likely resulting in a small increase to their unemployment insurance rates, they will be more likely to bargain in good faith to avoid a work stoppage altogether.

Unionized workplaces boost workers' economic security and workplaces for all, especially women and women of color who, when affiliated with a union or whose job is covered by a union contract, earn higher wages and are more likely to access employer-provided health insurance than women who are not in unions.¹ Nationally among women working full-time, those in unions have median weekly earnings of \$942, compared with \$723 for non-union workers, an increase of 30 percent.² Across all major racial and ethnic groups of women, median earnings are higher when comparing full-time workers in unions with full-time non-union workers.

Workers who join together to bargain wages, hours and working conditions earn better wages, utilize fewer safety net services, and experience less turnover than non-union workers. When striking workers can access unemployment benefits to help sustain themselves and their families, they can advocate for protections that benefit everyone.

¹ Institute for Women's Policy Research. 2018. Retrieved from: <https://iwpr.org/iwpr-publications/fact-sheet/the-union-advantage-for-women-2/#:~:text=Women%2C%20and%20especially%20women%20of.who%20are%20not%20in%20unions.>

² See note 1.

Senate Bill No. 938 follows examples set by New York and New Jersey who already allow striking workers to collect unemployment benefits. CWEALF urges the Committee to support this important legislation this session.